

INTERVIEW WITH BILLYE ROUTZAHN
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VIRGINIA M. SAGUE INTERVIEWER

VS: Could you tell us just a little bit about your life before you came to Kodiak?

BR: Before I was married, or after I was married?

VS: Just generally, where you grew up, how you met Tim, and then how you came to Kodiak.

BR: Well, my Dad in the Navy, and home was wherever Daddy dropped his hat. Fortunately for me, he went to Norfolk, Virginia one time and I was a cheerleader. Tim was a football player and I was cheerleading and routing for him. We started dating, not steadily, but we dated for about 5 years, and finally married in 1938. We got married. The day we got married he left for Honolulu. He came back a month later and he was home for two weeks and left for six months. And that was the way we started our life, just going from pillar to post and it seemed to be that way until we finally landed in Kodiak. Well, he came up before, and the children and I came in 1955. In January of 1955. The reason for that is we had a tiny baby and they wouldn't let us travel until he was eight weeks old and we had to come by ship. We had no planes coming into Kodiak at that time. The ship MSTS came into the station at Kodiak and Tim met us there. Because our quarters were not yet ready here on the base, we had to live in town and we started into town. At that time the old road was still in existence. We didn't have the road across the slide area. You had to travel the road that went across the side of the mountain. And that thing looked like it was about big enough for one car. It was a little wider, but not much. It had on the base side, it stopped, just about where the State Highway Department is located now. Then, that was the end of the Navy territory. The rest of the road was kind of a no-man's-land until you came to the where the Kodiak Transfer oil tanks are located and then it became Kodiak's problem. So in between, it was a no-man's-land.

When we would have snowslide or mudslide the base would furnish the equipment and town would furnish the manpower and it kept that area clean so the people could keep going. Because we had a lot of people who lived in town, Navy people. We had a few Coast Guard, too. And a lot of them lived in town. You had to be a certain rate before you could live on the base itself. So as I said, they would take turns cleaning up that no-man's-land until along about 1957. They had a bad landslide and the only way you could get people back and forth was to take the fishing boat from Gibson's Cove and run it into Kodiak. The State, no, the Road Commissioner, came over for a visit one time, and the only way he could get into town was to go by boat or helicopter, so they got the new road in that time. Let's see we left in, we were here for almost three years and we left and went to California and were there almost three years at the Naval Ammunition Depot and then we came back in 1960. When we were here the first time we moved into JOQ-IA right across from the Hospital and I worked at the hospital at that time. Then when we came back, we had five children at the time.

VS: Were any of your children born here in that hospital?

BR: No, our youngest was just eight weeks old when we came up here. So all five children, and Tim and I had to live in one of those small duplexes. We had our three daughters in the big bedroom and we had the two boys in the small bedroom and Tim and I had the back bedroom. Then when we came back the second time, we were living in the four-plex on the circle and our oldest boy had the room downstairs in the basement because he was fourteen. We lived there until 1962 when Tim retired and then we moved into Kodiak. We lived here just a short time and then they wanted us to move back onto the base. So we moved into Lake Louise and we lived there until 1973, no 1976, when we moved back into town. We bought this home, it was being built at the time and we've been here ever since.

VS: Had you worked for the Red Cross before you came here to Kodiak?

BR: Yes, I have worked for the Red Cross for 43 years. I worked as a volunteer, until 1961. In 1961, I became a professional. And then I retired. I retired in 1975, I think it was. I retired simply because they had decided they were going to close the Red Cross here on the base and we had to close the station as it was known at that time. Then, I continued as a volunteer because Captain Clark was here at the time, and I started working strictly as a volunteer because I felt that we needed Red Cross workers on the base, they shouldn't be taken away from us. And he felt the same way. So Charlie Clark started writing letters to national headquarters, the admiral got in on it, he started sending letters to headquarters and finally what they did was they decided that in order to keep national headquarters from closing us down when they cut back, they would have us work from the chapter. So now we work through the chapter, in a sense we do, I still work out of Elmendorf. I'm still considered a professional even though I've retired and come back again. But my immediate superior is in Elmendorf not the base or in Kodiak at all. And so, as I say, it's been since 1961 and even though we have closed the office out, as national at that time, it was still Red Cross and I worked as a volunteer for several, I guess, two and a half years and then we finally got established again.

VS: When you say that you became a professional, did they send you for training?

BR: Yes.

VS: Was it done here?

BR: No, on the mainland.

VS: What kind of training did they give you?

BR: It was training to work with service to military personnel. Strictly working with military people. How to write loans, how to provide counseling that they sometimes require, and things of this nature. How we provide loans for them: the purposes of the loan we have to distinguish, whether they're family assistance, whether they're emergency need, or whether they're just basic maintenance. What we do is if one of the service wives, the ship is out and she runs out of money, she doesn't get her allotment check, that's part of basic maintenance and we provide money for that. It's all in the form of a loan, unless there are dire circumstances and then we can make a grant. Otherwise it's strictly a loan.

VS: So you've done a lot of person-to-person work.

BR: Very much so.

VS: What kind of operation did the Red Cross have when you first got here?

BR: It was pretty much the same thing as it is now. Exactly, there hasn't been much change. It's the same and this is the same thing no matter where you go, wherever we have service to military personnel on a military base. And we all work the same way. I could leave here and go to another station and step right into it. It would be that familiar, I would be doing the same identical thing I'm doing here. And I could be transferred except that I made myself immobile because of having a home here and being here with Tim. But it was strictly my choice to become immobile, otherwise they could just transfer me anyplace.

But, when we first came to Kodiak, there were no paved streets. The only paved streets were on the base. When you walked down the main street; the way we know it today is not the way it was then. There were still cows wandering down the main street. Eventually they decided to pave it and put in curbs and then they brought in parking meters. We had ten parking meters and if you overstayed you paid a .25 fine. But let me go back a bit. The first time we came up here we came from Newport, Rhode Island and I went up to get a driver's license, we were still a territory at the time. The building was located behind where the Elks Club is now. There used to be a hill and the jail was up on top of that hill and then this little tiny building, it seemed to me it was joint library and other minor things. But they told me that was where I had to go to get my driver's license. So I walked in and there was a woman sitting there and she was writing, she never bothered to look up and she said, "May I help you?" and she continued writing and I said "Yes, I came to get a driver's license." And she said, "Do you drive?" And I said, "Yes", and she's still writing and looking down, and finally she said, "Fifty cents please", and when I gave her the fifty cents she looked up at me and said, "That's good for as long as you're here", and that was it. And I walked out. I never had to take a road test or anything in town. That was my first experience with the things of business and whatnot in town, it was a rude awakening because I fully expected having to take a road test and all that I didn't care for.

But in any case, we had Northern Commercial, and we had Wodlingers Drug Store, and Mrs. Nachweih had a five and ten store downtown and we had another little makeshift store. We had Kraft's but not located where, well it was located in that general area but it was just a small shop. But where Sutliff's is located now there was Kraft's department store down there and they had a little jewelry store that belonged to Knudsen's. It was a jewelry store and a photography shop and all kinds of interesting little things. If you wanted something "special" for a party they had that too under the counter. Just as you turned the corner off of the main street, what is now known as East Rezanov, and turn down what is now known as Marine Way, the house that is located over on Rezanov now, I don't know who lives in it, but it's on a corner and it's a two story house, and that used to be right on the corner where you turned down onto what is now known as Marine Way. They had a little gift shop in there. Marge and John, I can't think of their last name now, anyway, they owned it, and she had the gift shop and then eventually they put in a clothing shop up on the second floor. She had everything in that gift shop. They eventually retired from here and moved over to Anchorage. The High School where our oldest daughter went to school was located down where Kodiak Rental is now, on the corner. Well the High School used to be just above that. There was a little hill and the High School used to be located up there, it was a red building and that's where our oldest daughter went to school, she started high school there, when she was a freshman, she had to push a clove of garlic down the hall with their nose!!!!(lots of laughter !!!)

VS: You were talking about getting your driver's license earlier, how hard was it to get a vehicle in at that point? Did you bring your own?

BR: We brought our own.

VS: Right with you on the ship?

BR: Yes.

VS: That was 1955, were there a lot of cars?

BR: There were a lot of cars. We had a lot of people who came up and what they did was, the trip up would alternate. When we came up, we came up by way of Whittier, and we stopped in Whittier for a day, while they let a lot of they Army and Air Force people off and picked up a lot of the people who were returning to the states, or the lower 48, and then they came to Kodiak and then down. Then the next trip they would come to Kodiak first and then they would go to Whittier and then south. But the only way the people who were over on the mainland (either in Elmendorf or Fairbanks or Ft. Wainwright area) could get a vehicle was to have it come up by ship and they had to take the train from Anchorage down to Whittier and when you pulled in there you saw cars that had been there for months and of course this was in the dead of winter and they were buried under snow. We came up and people got off there, and then we came to Kodiak and had our car taken off here and that was the beginning of our tour in Kodiak and we didn't have any idea what to expect. We had only returned from Germany just a year or so before, so we had no idea what going from a foreign country to Alaska, which at that time was still kind of.., and we were looking for the rate of exchange, what is postage, do we buy United States stamps, or do we buy Alaska, what do we buy? We knew nothing about Alaska.

VS: Were you here for..

BR: We were here for the earthquake.

VS: No I was going to ask if you were here for statehood.

BR: In 1959, no we left and came back in 1960.

VS: I was curious what it was like during the statehood drive.

BR: We came back in 1960 and it became a state in 1959.

VS: What kind of work did you do for the Red Cross after the earthquake and the tsunami? I'm sure you were busy.

BR: Just exactly what I'm doing now, and incidentally, that was an exciting period because there were two of us working. I had an immediate superior who was here at the time who was the station manager, which I am now. I was the assistant then and he was out, he had been to Adak on a visit, and he was on his way back to Kodiak and he got as far as Shemya and there was no plane. Then we had the earthquake, he was stuck in Shemya, I was stuck here. None of us, the Red Cross people in Kodiak, had ever experienced anything like this. I had never experienced anything to that degree so we immediately did what we could do. We started taking messages from people who wanted to let their families know that they were okay. We were located behind what is now known as the gym. It was a little building back there, and the chaplains were there, the post office was there and my office was there. When the quake occurred I happened to be here in town, where we were living, at that transition period. Tim was out in Chiniak. We were home, the children and I had been to church, and we had gotten back and prepared dinner. While I was preparing dinner, I looked out and saw all the poles were going up and down, not going sideways, but they were going up and down. We knew then that we were in for trouble. So that evening we had to evacuate, we went up Pillar Mountain, the children and I. We walked out of the house, left the house wide open. Tim and I had celebrated our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary just a few months, the November before this occurred, and the only thing I could think about was that I've got to have ready cash. So we had twenty-five silver dollars inside, and of course I had my checkbook and all. I grabbed the twenty five silver dollars, grabbed my children and we headed out and up the hill. Our two older girls were married at that time so I only had three at home and we went up the hill, walked off and left the house wide open with cameras, Tim's guns, fur coats, everything, just forgot all about it. Then early the next morning the water had subsided enough so I could get to the base and I went back to base and that was the last I saw of my family for a week. We didn't know whether he (Tim) was dead or alive because he was out in Chiniak and we had no way of getting in touch with him. But, as I said, we started taking all these letters and calls from people on the base and people in town who wanted to send messages to their families. We were typing out messages through the CommSta and then we were sending letters and as I would get the letters ready the boys from the post office would put them in an envelope, put a stamp on them and put them in a large bag. We had a plane going out the next day, and it was going back to Whitby, and so all these letters, bags of letters that we had were on that plane. I would say probably three weeks later, I started getting many phone calls from people wanting to know why their request had not been honored. I said, "What do you mean?" "We thought you sent messages to our families." And we did, and those we sent out by Navy Communication were fine, that was no problem.

But those that we sent out by mail, they didn't get and we couldn't understand it. So the Post Office started a trace of it and they found that when the plane landed at Whitby Island they had taken all these bags of mail and put them into a safe and they were completely forgotten about until the Post Office put a tracer on them. So they came back and the post office had put an apology in the paper stating that we had done our job and that it was the people on the plane that had erred and taken the mail and put it in the safe. They were probably just glad to be back where they could walk on ground that wasn't shaking like it was here, it was still shaking here.

VS: So, everything was done by mail then, anything that wasn't official Navy Communication?

BR: We did send a lot of things out by Naval Communication but we were getting messages through Naval Communications that would be yards long because they were going to Seattle and then Seattle, King County Chapter was wiring up to us, and they were all duplication, almost every bit of it was duplication of letters and other messages that we were receiving. So, we were trying to get in contact with the people in town and we were combining our efforts and sending out their messages as well as our own. Then we started getting in all these clothes. Can you imagine, in March, in Alaska, where it's cold and we are receiving boxes of clothes that are sunsuits, sandals, cocktail dresses, anything that would do for summer wear is what we were receiving up here. We'd get a few sweaters, maybe a few heavy clothes, but most of it was just junk. A lot of it was just junk. As a matter of fact, we had a big bonfire later that summer because all of this stuff was stored up in the attic at Jack's garage, I can't think of his name now. He had a garage downtown, right across from Jack Mann. Everything was stored up in this attic and we took out everything that was usable and the rest of it, we just had a big bonfire and burned it all up. It was the only thing we could do with it.

VS: Was there much change for you when the Navy left, and the Coast Guard took over the base?

BR: No, everything continued right on the same. Wonderful, wonderful people. I think that Captain Clark was such a superb person. He was just wonderful, and his wife also. But the first people who came, let's see, we had, oh I can't even remember the first captain's name. I just drew a blank on his name, and I don't remember but Charlie, I think was the second or, he was the third one that was here. He was just great to work with. They were all very nice to work with, but he was a special person.

VS: Were there any other big events, like the earthquake that you were involved in?

BR: No, that was pretty much it. That was enough!!!! Well you know, when we were here the first time we would have these evacuations and we would have drills, but they weren't for tsunamis, they were for bombs. We had shelters, the BOQ was a shelter down below in the basement. There was a shelter up in Building 12 going down towards the Air Station, the big concrete building. No, Building 26, they were all shelters. We would have evacuations, where we would have to go into town and we had houses in Aleutian Homes that were designated safe areas for us. The people who lived in those homes knew which families to expect. And we were like sitting ducks. If we had really had a bombing at all, here we are taking this little tiny road that was running between the base and town and all of us families are lined up on this road getting into town. But I must say this much, one time we had a drill and we evacuated in twenty minutes. Off that base, the whole base in twenty minutes. We moved! And the base wasn't like it is today. The road that we had to take when we came out the main gate, which was pretty much where it is now, we'd have to go down, and you know the road where Peterson (Elementary) is, that's the road we took. Then some of us would get up on Aviation Hill which was a safe period when most of us were sent into town. Then later on they took us out to magazines out in the magazine area, instead of taking us into town. Which frankly, right now, Peterson is no place for us, the people on the base, for a safe spot. I shouldn't be saying this, but it's true, if we were to have a major wave, that's just like a bowl. We belong up on Aviation Hill or out further.

VS: Didn't they used to evacuate people out to T-1?

BR: Up on the hill, yes. We'd go up on the hill a lot of times. And there were barracks up there we could go to. But most of us were sent out to Aleutian Homes or out to the magazines.

VS: You were talking earlier, before we turned the tape on, about the club and activities you had out on Nyman's Peninsula when you were first here and your children were young. Could you talk about that a little more? What kinds of things were out there?

BR: Number one, up on Aviation Hill we had a rod and gun club. All of our children were involved in the gun club and they had an old retired Marine sergeant and he would teach adults and children and the children would have to know how to take a gun apart and put it together again before they were ever permitted to fire it. That was an excellent thing for them. All of our children are all sharpshooters because they took this training. Then there were dancing lessons from Betty Reid who now lives in Chiniak and that was located up, it was known then as Civilian Hill, because it was mostly occupied by civilian employees, who were working on the base. The school was located in a duplex that was located just up from Peterson School, up that little road that goes up into that housing area. It was on that right hand corner. Also we had performances down on the main pier. That little theatre was moved by Captain Strickler and Tim. It was moved from what is now known as Nemetz Park down to this location on the pier. It was just like a theatre, they had a stage and seats, they moved all the seats in and arranged them and everything. And that's where they had all the little theatre performances. Also down there they had a little booth, and whenever any of the MSTs ships or any of the other ships would come in the Red Cross would be down there with cookies and donuts and hot coffee for all the people that were on the ships. And they would come down, all the passengers, or the people who were aboard the ships, would come down and have a snack and go back aboard and get ready to leave. It was neat. I mean it was great. We had so much cooperation and so many people who were interested in helping and doing these things. But going back to the Little Theatre; I just learned two weeks ago, that Marion Strickler, her husband was the Navy Captain here, she was the one who started the theatre on the base. I just learned that she is still living in San Diego and I didn't know this until two weeks ago. I'd thought she'd passed away. But she's still alive. In fact her daughter, her youngest daughter was up here, not visiting anyone specific, she simply came back to Kodiak. She's married now and has a family of her own. But she came back to Kodiak because she wanted to see what it was like and that was this past summer.

After the earthquake, that part of the island sunk and as you note when you go down there now, at high tide the water is awfully high, awfully high!!

VS: So they lost a lot of ground down there on Nyman's?

BR: Yes. We had quarters down there on Nyman's Peninsula. We had a TV station on Nyman's Peninsula. Where the power house is now located, just beyond that, there were quarters, duplexes, and then there's a little road that goes up and around and that's where the radio and TV station was located up there. And at that time we had the bowling alley down there. The bowling alley was down around the end of the point. We had a Special Services Officer who was getting ready to leave, he was being transferred, and he had a little VW and he had sold it, but the person he had sold it to had said he could use it until he was ready to go. So when the first wave came in he made a hurry up trip down to the bowling alley to see what damage had been done and when he came back out his VW was floating out in the bay. Another wave had come in, not quite as large, but big enough to carry his car out and the insurance company said he couldn't get any money back on it. He had to pay back the money he'd been given for it to the individual who had bought it. He lost his insurance, which of course at that time wouldn't have been more than about fifty dollars because the car wasn't that new!

VS: So the Billiken and other things down there are of a much later generation, built to replace these earlier things?

BR: Yes, before they built the bowling alley down on Nyman's Peninsula, we used to bowl in the basement of the Exchange, what is now the Gym building. That was the Exchange at that time. The bowling alley was downstairs. Off to the back part was the gymnasium downstairs, but if you went downstairs and turned immediately to your left, we had something like six lanes, it was fun, it was great.

VS: They're still working on trying to get that swimming pool!

BR: Well, you know, that was where the theatre now is, that was to be a pool.

VS: Is that really a true story?

BR: That is really a true story. The person who drew up the plans was a very good friend of ours, he's gone now. That was to be a swimming pool, then our theatre burned down and they decided that the theatre was needed more than a pool so that was the reason they converted it to a pool. Marty Gundersen, whose husband had been stationed here twice, was the one who named it the Billiken. She was quite a gal. They had a contest and it was Marty who won the contest to come up with a name.

VS: So it was actually being built as a pool when they changed their minds? It never actually served as a pool?

BR: No, it never did. And you can tell when you go in and look at the construction of it, that's it.

VS: What year was that? Do you remember?

BR: Oh shoot, that had to be in the early 1960's. Yes because he (Tim) was commissioned by that time and it was after he was commissioned that, yes the early 60's.

VS: Was it before, or after the earthquake?

BR: After the earthquake. It doesn't seem possible.

VS: How many years was it that you were gone between tours?

BR: Almost three years.

VS: Did you notice a big difference when you came back, had things changed much during that time?

BR: No, the change came after the earthquake. Up to that time things were pretty much the same. The bars were open all night and you could walk down the street any hour of the day or night and if you saw natives who were inebriated they would nod their heads and greet you but they would keep on going, they never assaulted you or were insulting to you in any way. After the earthquake, people didn't know about Kodiak until the earthquake, and after that we had this tremendous influx of everyone and everything changed at that time. We never heard of young women being raped, we never heard of homes being broken into, we could go off and leave our house wide open, you couldn't do that today.

I used to love all of these students who would come up in the summertime. They would come up in May and they would live in the bunkers and things along the hillside so that they could work in the cannery and make their money so they could go back to school for another year with the money they earned. Today they don't. There are no jobs for them, those jobs are being taken by other people. None of the students can get the work they used to have. They used to sleep down on the beach, they would sleep in the bunkers, they'd pitch tents up on the hillsides, anyplace. They would go down to the laundramat to take a bath and to wash their clothes. They had no running water, they had no heat, but they were willing to put up with all of this in order to make the money to go to school. You have to hand it to them, they were that eager for an education and the money was good. Unfortunately we don't have that now.

VS: So you got here after the first major population boom during WW II. That had already settled in and tapered off when you arrived?

BR: Yes, a while before we got here.

VS: The boom after the earthquake, was it mostly people coming in to rebuild?

BR: Yes, and people came up to make easy money and we had too much..... well I'd better not get carried away!!

VS: Were you involved in any other groups beside the Red Cross?

BR: Besides Red Cross, we were members of the original Flying Club on the base, both of us. Both belonged to the Eastern Star in town and we chaperoned at the Teen Club many,,, times!!! The Officers Wives Club, and we bowled, it seemed like we were always on the go. We never did join the Pioneers Club, as much as we would have liked to, because we feel that if we can't put our whole heart and soul into something, we don't want to get involved in it. So we never did get involved with that. Our whole time was taken up with Eastern Star and the Officers Wives Club and our children and sorority, those were my main interests.

VS: Did you do much going out the road toward Chiniak, since Tim was working in Chiniak at the time?

BR: Oh, yes. We have property out in Chiniak, and right after the earthquake, we had another friend of ours who was a retired Navy Captain, whose property adjoined ours and they were out of town at the time of the earthquake. So as soon as the roads were passable, our oldest daughter was living in Dutch Harbor and she had left her VW here with us, so we took the VW, Tim and I went out one day, and we had another friend with us, she was a Navy nurse who was stationed here at the time. We got in the car and drove out because we had to go out and check on Hopi and Spike Carrithers' property. We weren't concerned about our own, but they had a home out there and we didn't. So we got out to Kalsin and the road that we normally take was washed out. It used to be when you got to the foot of Kalsin Hill you made a sharp left and then you went along the beach until you got on the other side and then you crossed a bridge. Well, at this time they had already started cutting a road through (the back road we presently know) and we got to the first bridge and all they had across the bridge were railroad ties and that was the first bridge and the second bridge was the same way. Then when we got over to the fork where you went to the right to go to Pasagshak, left to Chiniak, we made the left hand turn but then we had no road. We had to go through the lake and we would have to wait for low tide and then we would go through the lake and somebody was usually on the other side with a pulley and they would pull us ashore. Then we would go on out. We would get out to Chiniak and check on the property. We did this several times. They had a small cabin down on the lake, Pony lake, at that time, and they were not quite ready to build, well no, they were starting to build up on their little hill. But they had a Navy wife and her husband staying there. He was a Lcdr on the base and Elaine worked out at the tracking station. At this particular time, she was staying out at the cabin, and he would go out every weekend, or maybe during the week and spend a couple of days out there too. But at this particular time they were both in town, fortunately, because the ice on Pony Lake had been lifted and then tossed and came down on the cabin and completely squashed it. The only thing that was standing upright was the freezer. It had been moved from the cabin up against the hill, where their home was to be built eventually, and it was standing right there by the hill, but the rest of it was just squashed. The water had just come in off the ocean, into the lake and kind of swirled around and then back out again. We had all our lumber out there to build and it was just swirled around, and it was in pretty bad shape. We were just fortunate we didn't have a house at the time.

This particular time, when we got ready to come back to Kodiak, we started down the hill, and of course the only way we could get through, because the road we would usually take was washed out, was to go on the beach. That was the same way we got in to begin with. We got stuck in the sand. We would go up and down and look for little pieces of wood and put them in front of the wheel and then we'd go a little bit further, then move the wood around. That's just the way we were progressing by just moving the wood along. Then finally, some boys from the little Navy came by and asked if we were having problems, they could see we were having problems! So they bodily picked up the car and moved it up on firmer ground so that we could make our way back to Kodiak. Then when we got back to the lake again we had to ford the lake.

VS: So you couldn't just go out the road for the day, obviously?!

BR: No, you had to time it. You had to go at low tide and then return at low tide. Maybe at least 12 hours. That was the only way you were able to get out there. It was quite an experience. And then one time we came back and got right over there by Woman's Bay. Of course the road wasn't built-up there and it was under water. We were driving a Ford and these kids were in a VW in front of us and their car stopped on them. Instead of just waiting or trying to move otherwise or waiting for somebody to pull them through, they opened the doors and all the water came swishing in on them!

VS: Now, to change subjects again and go back to something we talked about earlier. When we were talking about the earthquake, I wanted to ask you how long it was before your work life with the Red Cross went back to normal?

BR: As I said, for a week we stayed right in the office. The boys in the galley would bring our meals over to us. The chaplains were there too, and the boys in the post office. Somebody brought around little space heaters for us and we had sleeping bags. We just stayed in that building for a good week. By this time, my oldest son was able to get back and forth and he was making reports on the family in town. And then Tim, I think it was about a week later I learned that he had started into town. I was always giving him a hard time about forgetting things, but I swore then that I would never give him a bad time again, because he had started into town, from Chiniak, and right before you got to Kalsin to go over the bridge, he couldn't remember whether he had done something out at Chiniak and he turned around and went back. That was when the big wave came in and it killed four people. What had happened was that it came in with such force, there was a Navy wife and her son who were coming into town. Her husband was there, I think he was driving another car. The wave got them and pulled them out. The other was the Vosgien boy and Mr. Curry. The Curry's had a house right at the foot of Kalsin Hill. He and the little Vosgien boy, they had all been on a beach party on the other side of Kalsin Bay Bridge and they had started back to the house to pick up something, and were headed back again when this happened. They found their bodies all the way up on the other side. They'd been pushed a good mile. So many things, so many memories come flooding back and you start remembering those things and how sad they were.

VS: Do your children have vivid memories of that whole experience?

BR: Oh yes. Both of our oldest girls were married and our second daughter lived in the little house at the corner of Rezanov and what is now known as Marine Way where Jack Mann is located now. She had a home right there. The younger children and I had gone to church and I had stopped at Kraft's which was just across the street. She was pregnant at the time and I had stopped to look at a dress for her and found a real cute one. I went up to let her know I wanted her to go down and try it on. Then the little ones and I came home. Well, right after that we had the wave and she never got down there. But, she and her husband stood down there at the boat harbor and took pictures and fortunately our oldest daughter and her husband came by and saw them standing there, oblivious to what could have happened, and just bodily put them in the car and said let's get out of here, let's get to high ground. So they headed for Pillar Mountain. I didn't even hear the police coming through telling everybody to head to high ground, until the boys came to the house and said, "Billye, what are you doing here? Get up on Pillar Mountain." They said the police were going around saying there was a 100 foot wave, we never heard a sound, never heard a sound.

VS: Obviously, there was not the sophisticated siren system we have now?

BR: Oh no. They didn't have anything like that. They depended strictly on the police. They just went around. And people going up Pillar Mountain, the cars were just one after the other.

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People were just stopping anyplace they could and walking the rest of the way because they couldn't drive through. The hill was just alive with people and we sat up there and we could watch everything floating down the channel. You could see lights floating. Then, the whole town changed after that. I'm trying to ... I mean if we could draw a picture of the way it was, I mean it was so unique, it was a lovely little fishing town when we first came here, it really was. It was so different. You went down this little main street, with the drug store on the corner, made a left hand turn and there was Wilton White's mother's home and then the bank and then you made another right turn and that went , oh and there was a hotel on the corner, then you went on down the hill and there was Donnelley and Achison's department store and the museum, which at that time was not being used as a museum, it was being used for storage I think. Then all along that area down there where the Chamber of Commerce and all are, those were all piers and a couple of little restaurants that were locally owned. It was just so different. Now they've made it into a modern little town. It lost a lot of charm. It did. I loved it the way it was even though it was not paved. When we first moved out here (Larch Street) still we had no paved streets, I mean it was all dust and only one other house across the street from us at the time. Now look at it.

VS: I was thinking that tonight, as we drove down. I always forget Larch Street is so long with so many houses. And I was wondering what it looked like before they were all here.

BR: It was beautiful. Now, so many people have cut down their trees. We used to have so many trees, beautiful trees. Our trees that we had on our hill were blown down because so many people when they built had cut their trees down, the hill was so barren, so the trees had no protection. When we had that freak wind storm our trees were blown down. We had one come through our dining room. People on the other side of us had their trees come down in their daughter's bedroom, just knocked down everything. It was quite a storm.

VS: Talking about how things changed so much, after the earthquake: when they started planning the "urban renewal" as they called it. That was basically what you got. What do you remember of the debate and "discussion" or fighting that went on over what direction the rebuilding would take?

BR: My mother and dad had come up to visit that summer. They came up to see the damage that had been done. They decided they were going to spend a year here. They were both very much involved in what was going on in town. The politics and all of town. They kept stating that they felt that the town of Kodiak should be rebuilt out Monashka Bay and everybody kept saying, oh no, the winds are too bad off the bay, that would never do for the town to be built out there. Well, now you see where the town is moving. It's all moving out that way. They thought that they should keep the downtown strictly commercial and fishing, and things of that nature. Of course we didn't have Near Island, we had Near Island but no connection with it as we do today. Then when that bridge was built, it was called the Bridge to Nowhere because it stopped right on the other side. There were no roads or anything. Well, the whole town just began to rebuild and they changed all the streets, the directions of them and everything. That's when they built Rezanov and took it up the hill. When we first came here, you came up Mill Bay and went up to where the elementary school is, which used to be the High School. Rezanov didn't exist. We could've bought land over there for \$800.00 and you couldn't touch it for that now. There was no road over there at all where Helen Hall and the mayor live. That road was not there. The hospital was down off of Mission Road, Griffin Memorial Building. There were very few roads.

VS: Was there any damage to the hospital?

BR: No, because of their location, there was very little, they were right on the channel, but when the water came up it did very little damage, they were very fortunate, actually. Going back to rebuilding the town, we really felt that if they wanted to make it a safe town, as far as another tidal wave was concerned, they should build it farther out, and not so close to the water. We had safes floating in the middle of the street after the wave. The reason I mention that is because the Elks Club was almost inundated with water. The water was running down into the basement, people got out just in time with the wave coming in and filling up down there. We just strongly felt that the town, businesses of the nature we have now, should be built further out and on higher ground. Keep the fishing boats and things down there where they belong, even though one of the fishing boats did end up near where Kodiak Rental is located-they kept saying "Selief, where are you?" And he said, "Would you believe I'm tied up to a telephone pole just below the high school?"

VS: Did it get very rancorous during the planning for the rebuilding?

BR: Yes. The people didn't want to move out. They wanted to rebuild right back down in the same area. Just like the people in Tennessee Valley and places like that, get wiped out by a flood every year and go back and rebuild again. Same thing. But they poured a lot of money into it and rebuilt it down there and that's fine. That's great. If this is where they want to be that's their prerogative. But now you see all the businesses are beginning to move out. They're all moving out to Monashka. But it just seemed to make a lot of sense to us to do that at the time. Even though it is going into bear country and bear preserve.

VS: That's a whole other problem!

BR: Yes, it certainly is!

VS: I feel like we should give your vocal chords a break. Is there anything you want to talk about that I didn't ask you about.

BR: I can think of so many things when you're not here--what I should have done was write down some of them.

VS: One thing you were saying--when you first came here you said you worked at the hospital?

BR: Yes, the Naval Hospital. Which was located right across the street from our house (on the base).

VS: I have to laugh. Tonight, right before we drove out here, I was looking at an aerial photograph of the base from the early 1970's. That hospital was huge compared to everything else around it. That must have been some building. It took them almost a year and a half to knock it down and remove it. They were doing that the year we arrived here--early 1989.

BR: It was a wonderful building, I never will understand why they tore it down. It wasn't that old. What money they put into that new clinic they could've put into surgical rooms, OR's and that sort of thing. Most of the work that was put into that building in our time was volunteer. The Seabees scrounged and they got paneling and they got all kinds of things to put in that hospital to save money. We had OB/GYN and the maternity ward upstairs, and then the other wards were downstairs. We had a complete hospital. We had surgery, we had optical services, dental services, everything was located in there. The only time anybody came into town, were the doctors or the nurse anesthetist who came into town because they needed somebody at the hospital here in town for an emergency. Otherwise, everything was contained here on our base. It was very nice. We had pediatricians, obstetricians, dentists, surgeons, general practitioners, we had everything.

VS: It was a bigger active duty population then?

BR: Much larger facility then. But remember, we had Marines, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force and some Army. So we had a lot of people using it.

VS: Was Fort Greely still operating?

BR: No, we still had building there left over from the Army, when it was known as Fort Greely, but it was not active. By that time, they had a few quarters and they had moved some of the military families in there. They were beginning to realize there wasn't enough housing on the base for people and the housing in town was so minimal and so expensive that a lot of our people couldn't afford it. Of course, when you came up here you came up on invitation, invitational orders. If you brought your family up, that was your problem, you didn't get quarters on base. Until such time as you were rated and could qualify for quarters. Otherwise you had to make do with whatever was available in town. Lake Louise was nice. They still had quarters there that were left over from World War II. Fort Greely was that portion where Nemetz Park is located. But Lake Louise was separate. Oh, and the chapel we have on base. It was moved from Fort Greely. When it was first brought in it was the Catholic Chapel and the Protestant services were held at the Chief's Club up on Aviation Hill. It got to be a standing joke in the winter months. They didn't have many services because nobody could make it up the hill. Then they finally decided to make it a joint chapel which makes sense. Of course, then there was talk of building another chapel and having a community center, as we do now, and then another chapel being built adjoining that. One Catholic and the other non-denominational. And that may still come to pass. Talking to Captain Barrett the other day and he said that we were going to have a lot of changes, even our building. We're going to be moved over near the Child Care Center. It's going to be all Community Services and Work Life as they're being known now. No longer family services. All of us, Red Cross, Family Services, Drug and Alcohol, and the Chaplains will all be there together in the new building. Something like a five million dollar building.

VS: Near where the old hospital was?

BR: In 1995, over in that area, yes. He said by 1995, it'll be ready.

VS: You will have traveled quite a way from getting off that boat in 1955!!

BR: (Much laughter) You'd better believe that! But you know, prior to that, we'd traveled. Going back a bit, being raised in the Navy, I lived in China for three years with my parents. My sister was born there. And we lived in the Philippines. Then Tim and I, in 1949, we went to Europe. We lived in Europe for almost three years. We went over right after the war when the rubble was still in existence. Tim met us in Bremerhaven and drove us down to Wiesbaden, right outside of Wiesbaden where he was stationed. Our home was located in Eltville, and we had a 26 room villa. Can you imagine that? We lived in a 26 room villa. Then to go to a three bedroom duplex in Alaska!!! It was the most wonderful experience, living in Germany, and the people, you couldn't ask for more wonderful people. We still keep in touch with many of them. They were so good to us and I can remember one day the girls that worked for us, I was going into the base to do some shopping and I asked if there was anything I could pick up for them--lipstick or hosiery or something. And they all said, no Frau Routzahn, no. When I asked why, they said, everyone would think we were soldiers girlfriends!

My only regret, of all the time we were in the service was that I never got through the Panama Canal. Isn't that silly?! I always wanted to do that. But we never made it.

VS: I think we'll turn this off now and give everybody a break!

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